

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood.
- B. Welcome to the Art of Thriving, part 5. Jesus promised an abundant life to those who walk in his ways. Overflowing, like the waves of the sea. Uncontainable, rich, and full.
- C. This thriving is the plan of God for you today. It is his will. You may have come today with a sense of great prosperity and abundance in your heart. I'm glad for you.
- D. Or you may have come with a feeling of poverty. Nothing goes well for you. Everything is broken.
- E. In either case, I want to speak to you today. I want to give you hope, encouragement, and maybe even a little direction.
- F. Here is our main Bible verse for today:
 - 1. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)*
- G. The mind-blowing fact of Christianity is that God has come down to make our hearts his home. My heart. Your heart. A dwelling place of God. Ever since the opening chapters of the Bible, when God said he would dwell in the tents of Shem — one of Noah's sons, and the god-father of the Jews. Think of it. The infinite, almighty, omnipresent, omnipotent Creator of galaxies and stars would stoop to dwell in the humble tents of a humble woman or man.
- H. Thousands of years later, that promise was still in effect. It kicked into high gear in Jesus Christ.
 - 1. *And the Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt [pitched his tent] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*
- I. The uncreated, infinite, God has pitched his tent in the human heart.
- J. But he is worthy of far more than a tent, don't you think? When he comes, he is making you into something far more glorious than an old canvas tent.
- K. It is God's intention to give your soul and your heart a makeover, and this is the secret of the Art of Thriving.
- L. Will you think with me today on The Royal Palace of the Soul.
- M. Isn't it odd, that a being like God, who sees the facade, still loves the clod, he made out of sod? Now isn't that odd? (author unknown, quoted by Ray Stedman)

II. The Royal Palace of Your Soul

- A. *The BUILDER is God*
 - 1. *For we are His workmanship.*
 - 2. Verse 8 says you are saved by grace. And here, verse 10 says you are sanctified by grace.
 - 3. Grace means that this is God's work, God's effort, God's labor, God's gift.
 - 4. If you have Jesus, you are no longer your own workmanship, you are God's.
 - 5. Let me rewind a little. In the first Art of Thriving message, I reminded you of four steps along your life's pathway with God.
 - a) *God Saves you.* This is that moment when you trust in Jesus as your only hope for time and eternity, and God adopts you into his family forever.
 - b) *God Blesses you.* In that exact same moment, God joins you to Christ. You become one with Jesus so that all that is true of Jesus is now true of you. AND all that belongs to Jesus now belongs to you. His treasures are your treasures, one hundred percent. You are immeasurably blessed on Day One. That means you don't serve God FOR blessing, you only serve him FROM blessing.
 - c) *God Grows you.* This is where you spend the rest of your life. Learning more about God and life with him. You grow wise. You grow mature. You grow put together. You grow normal. As you do that, you move into step four.
 - d) *God Uses you.* Good works, which is our topic today. This is your calling and mission in the world. It is how you donate your life to helping people find and follow God — and do that in a way that is a blessing, not a burden.
 - 6. Step one — *salvation*.
 - 7. Steps two, three, and four — *sanctification* (the process of God making you more and more like Jesus, his character, his action, his maturity, his courage flowing through you.)
 - 8. Everything is by grace. It is a total makeover of you. It is a liberation of your truest, deepest, most authentic self from an avalanche of pain.
 - 9. It is all of God. He is the author and finisher of your faith. You are his workmanship. (Not "poem" as that is something preachers say that simply isn't correct.)
 - a) *I am confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)*
 - 10. If all your life you have heard of good works as a way of living with God, there's only one thing you need to fix.
 - 11. You need to picture God as the maker of those good works, and everything will be okay.
 - 12. God himself is building a palace in your soul... It's made out of grace and it's mortared with mercy and it's furnished with truth.
 - 13. It can bear the weight of all your burdens.
 - 14. And the more he builds, the lighter the burden you bear.
- B. *The BLUEPRINT is Christ*
 - 1. *Created in Christ Jesus.*
 - 2. In the Bible, only God creates. You being a Christian isn't just an improvement on the old you. It's a whole new creation.
 - a) *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)*
 - 3. When you see in the Bible the words, "in Christ" or sometimes it's just "In him," you are talking about one of the most fantastic truths there is.

4. On the day you received Jesus as your Savior, God did something irreversible: he joined you to Jesus Christ. He superglued you to Christ. You became one with him. The Bible says you were married to Christ, joined to Christ, baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ (Romans 7:4, 1 Corinthians 6:17, Romans 6:3-6).
 5. Before meeting Jesus, I was plain, solitary Bill. Just me. Bill plus zero.
 6. Now that I have Jesus as my Savior, I am Bill plus Christ forever. I've been fused to him, so to speak. My old identity is gone—Bill plus zero no longer exists. Only the new one remains, Bill plus Christ. As weird as it might sound, this is a very good thing.
 7. The Bible uses the words “in Christ” or “in him” to indicate this. Here's one of many examples:
 - a) *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 8:1).*
 8. To be in Christ is to be totally free from condemnation, once for all.
 9. See how that works?
 10. Buckle your seat belt, because the implications are astounding. You are so joined to Jesus Christ that whatever God says about Jesus, he now says about you.
 11. If God were to describe you today, what would he say? If he were to stand up in the throne room of heaven, command the silence of the worshipping angels and feasting saints, and say, “Today, I'm going to tell you all about [insert your name here,]” what would that celestial speech sound like?
 12. If you are in Christ, he would describe you in the same terms he would use to describe Jesus.
 - a) What does God say about Jesus? Is he beautiful? Is he acceptable? Is he valuable? Is he powerful?
 - (1) Then you are too.
 - b) What would God never say about Jesus? I hate you? I don't want you? You're ugly? Leave me alone? You're stupid? It's unthinkable.
 13. If he would never say those things about Jesus, then he would never say, or even think, those things about you. You are one with Christ.
 14. When God joined you to Christ, he erased every demeaning label that every schoolyard bully, every mean girl, every stoned parent, and every religious hypocrite ever spray-painted across your heart. You are not ugly. You are not stupid. You are not worthless. You are not anything the world says you are.
 15. You are who God says you are.
 16. And he says you are in permanent union with the best person whose leather sandals ever trudged the dusty streets of planet earth.
 17. You are one with Christ on good days and bad days. When your faith is strong and when your faith is not existent.
 18. This is one of the reasons why you cannot lose your salvation, even if you tried. You are as secure as Christ is secure. Can he be kicked off his heavenly throne? Never. Then you can't be kicked off that throne either.
 19. When God builds the place in your heart, he is doing one great thing: he is creating a life meshing together your personality with Christ's awesomeness.
 20. Christ is the blueprint.
 - a) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...
- C. *The FUNCTION is for Good Works*
1. *Unto good works.*
 2. Architects create the overall look of buildings. But the design goes far beyond appearance. The building must also be functional. It must do what the client wants it to do.
 3. God is the client, and he created you in Christ Jesus “unto good works.”
 4. The “unto” means with this is the goal he had in mind.
 5. What this is about is not obvious. That's because...
 6. Good works start “in you” (Philippians 1:6). God began a good work in you.
 7. In fact, most of the good works in your life are changes that happen inside you. God is tearing out the walls, and rewiring the house. You've been wired wrong.
 - a) He has to correct the lies you've believed.
 - b) He has to tear out the despair you've received.
 - c) He has to fill up the wisdom you lack.
 - d) He has to break the bonds of temptation, deliver you from trauma, and repair a broken heart.
 - e) He has to create a royal place inside of you. This is where God meets with you, and comforts you. It is where you know him and he knows you. This Royal Palace of your soul is where he walks with you and talks with you and tells you you are his own.
 - (1) This is the Royal Palace of your soul.
 - (a) It is the mother of all good works.
 - (b) It's the big deal of all good works.
 8. He fills you with grace, and mercy, and power, and peace, and love.
 - a) *Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches. (Proverbs 24:3, 4, NKJV).*
 9. As this structure grows, God's goodness overflows.
 - a) Good works God's way can only exist in the overflow of grace.
 10. God has a name for all your good works that don't exist in the overflow of grace.
 - a) *They're called “dead works” (Hebrews 6:1; 9:14).*
 11. I served God for a very long time with dead works. I helped with worship ministry, kids ministry, high school ministry, and set up ministry. I was very busy for Jesus.

12. I was convinced that God didn't like me. So I worked very hard to change that. It was a huge burden, and it wore me out.
 13. Dead works.
 14. But when you're following the grace pathway, you'll be doing what comes naturally.
 15. Your works will flow in the overflow of grace.
 - a) People who see you will see the love of Christ.
 - b) They will see the character of Christ.
 - c) They will watch the character of Christ.
 - d) They will experience the power of Christ.
 - e) And they will sense the presence of Christ.
 - (1) It isn't you, it's Christ.
 - (a) *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)*
 16. God is turning you into a launching pad for grace. He wants to fire it into the world.
 17. And when God does that through you, it will be unlike how he does it with any other child of heaven.
- D. *The CONCEPT is Eternal and Comprehensive*
1. *Which God has foreordained [prepared beforehand].*
 2. Your good works are not random bits of niceness thrown into the world. Instead, they are part of a master plan.
 - a) God has foreordained them.
 3. There's a master plan in the world. God is working it out all the time. But most of the time, we don't notice it.
 4. I am from Chicago. I am preaching today in northern California. There is no way that my path would have ever crossed with your path, unless God had a plan.
 5. God works his master plan all the time, but most of us usually don't notice when it happens.
 6. God is building a royal palace inside you. And every room meshes together what you need with what your world needs.
 - a) Whatever I've got to offer, Redding needs, so God brought me here.
 - b) And whatever Redding has to offer, I need, so God brought me here.
 7. The two go together.
 8. When I was in Chicago, it was home to a whole bunch of Christian publishers. I wanted to write books, but that never happened when I was in Chicago.
 9. But God brought me here, to Redding. God had foreordained some good works for me here. And I walked in them, and one day a man took me out for coffee. His name was Dave. He was a successful author. Dave said, you have to publish this stuff you preach. And he got me started.
 10. God had foreordained these good works.
 11. He planned them. He orchestrated them. He set the table for them. He brought me out here, and Dave out here, and you and all of us, for such a time as this.
 12. God has a niche for you. Only you can fill it. There are certain ways you can launch grace into the world that I can't. And there are certain ways that you can't that I can. It's all foreordained, pre-planned, and part of a master plan.
 - a) There's a great story in the Old Testament, where the Amalekites attack the Israelites. (Exodus 17:8,ff)
 - b) There's a war going on.
 - c) Joshua is the warrior. He leads the armies on the field of battle.
 - d) Moses is the leader. He sits on the hillside, lifts his hands, and prays.
 - (1) Whenever Moses prays, Israel prevails.
 - (2) But when his hands grow weary, and he pauses, Amalek prevails.
 - e) So two assistants go help Moses. They are Aaron and Hur.
 - (1) *But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. (Exodus 17:12, 13)*
 13. Joshua fought, Moses prayed, and Aaron and Hur held up his hands. Each one had a niche. A speciality.
 - a) That's how the victory was won.
 - b) God's master plan perfectly meshed Joshua with Moses, with Aaron, and with Hur.
 - (1) Only God can do this.
 14. God is building a royal palace inside your soul, and the concept is eternal and comprehensive.
 - a) Your generosity is part of God's master plan.
 - b) Your service for Christ and his kingdom is part of God's master plan.
 - c) Your love for your husband or wife, or your kids, or your friends — your sacrificial grace — it's all part of God's master plan.
 15. You didn't just do those good works spontaneously or randomly. They were foreordained by God since before the foundations of the world.
 - a) God planned it.
 - b) God enabled it.
 - c) God set the table.
 - d) God created the environment.
 - e) God orchestrated the timing.
 - f) God coordinates the labors of others.
 - g) God provided the resources.

(1) The tiniest good work you've ever done is anchored in the eternal counsels of Almighty God. Your thriving was in God's heart long before you were ever born.

(2) God gets the glory.

16. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has foreordained [prepared beforehand] that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)*

E. The PATTERN is your choice.

1. That we should walk in them

2. To walk is to pattern your life. It is to make consistent choices in a certain direction.

a) Your life is in Christ's hands.

b) Your lifestyle is in yours.

3. Here is this river. It flows with the current of God's goodness and grace. Step in and go with the flow.

4. Or step out, and do things your own way.

5. God can build a palace more awesome than you can conceive. If he does, will you occupy it?

6. God has put together the Grace Pathway, now walk in it.

7. He is building a royal palace in your soul. Don't, by your choices, dismantle it as fast as he builds it.

a) Walk in his ways.

b) Think in his ways.

c) Choose in his ways.

d) Live in his ways.

8. Because his ways are all grace.

III. Conclusion

A. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)*

B. I can't wrap up this verse without linking it to something that comes earlier.

C. This chapter begins with a bleak assessment of human nature. We were dead in trespasses and sins. We were taken captive by the dark side, and under the influence of evil. The devil and his demons had their way with us.

D. It is a somber assessment of the condition of our world.

E. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine, and this is why.

F. This bondage to the dark side explains the human condition.

G. Nothing else remotely approaches it in explaining the persistence of evil.

H. The inability of human beings to solve the basic problems of life.

I. The continual appearance of the same societal problems over and over again.

J. It explains the inability to end war, and eliminate it from our planet.

K. It reveals the shallowness of all the thinking of those who think by shouting some slogans, or by political legislation we can somehow alter the difficulties of life, or switch off the giant pain machine.

L. This assessment explains crime. It explains family breakdown and abuse. It explains self-preoccupation and the pervasive grip of despair.

M. And into this darkness comes the magical words, "But God..."

1. *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)... (Ephesians 2:4, 5)*

N. Those words change the whole picture.

O. God wants to embed this truth in your soul:

1. *No matter what is happening in the world around you, God can still deliver blessing to the world within you.*

P. He can deliver security that bankers can't repossess. He can deliver hope that criminals can't steal. And he can deliver happiness that money can't buy. God knows how to bless his children, even during a recession.

Q. That's because it's not the size of your portfolio, but the condition of your soul, that matters most. Why do we burn so much fuel wringing our hands over money, and grades, and popularity, and comfort, and so little fuel constructing the royal palace inside that actually enjoys the happiness we fantasize all these things will buy?

R. Instead of repositioning assets, why not reposition your soul? What if our greatest problem isn't the economic environment, but our grace-starved "environment"?

S. I want you to embrace a secret that stretches back to the dawn of humankind—the open secret of the Art of Thriving. You can be thin in the wallet and rich in your heart. You can step up to the high ground of a God-blessed life in any economy, with any level of health, in any kind of relationship, and in any external environment no matter who's in power, and no matter what skeletons rattle your closet.

T. Because, God is your ally and friend.

U. And he's told you that not only in his Word, but by that same Word, down in the deepest recesses of your soul.

V. The Great Architect is building something beautiful in your heart.

W. Walk in his ways and enjoy it.